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ABSTRACT

A survey consisting of 8 items was sent to alumni of graduate level programs in reading education at 3 universities to obtain an overall picture of the remedial reading practicum experience and to elicit information about the degree to which former students find their experiences in remedial reading education programs relevant to their current teaching situation. Two questions were addressed: (1) Are preservice remedial reading clinical/practicum experiences useful to actual classroom practice and, if so, to what degree? (2) What common characteristics are associated with the applicability of preparatory practices to later classroom experiences? Results indicated a relatively high degree of applicability for many components associated with clinical/practicum courses. Informal procedures such as informal reading inventories and miscue analysis were among those that teachers found applicable to their classrooms. By contrast, instructional emphases such as shared reading, generating interest in reading, and computers were reported as frequently used by teachers in their classrooms, but infrequently used in practica. Regarding instructional methods used by clinical/practicum professors, respondents found most helpful those activities which actively involved them in the construction and application of knowledge as opposed to transmittal types of instruction such as readings and lecture. Findings suggest areas in which existing practica might be modified as well as directions for future research. (Contains 4 tables of data.) (Author/RS)

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An Examination of the Applicability of Remedial Reading Clinical and Practicum Experiences Across Three States

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Prepared for the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference
San Antonio, TX
December 3, 1992

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An Examination of the Applicability of Remedial Reading Clinical and Practicum Experiences Across Three States

Annual meeting of the National Reading Conference
San Antonio, Texas
December 3, 1992

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ABSTRACT

A survey consisting of eight items was sent to alumni of graduate level programs in reading education at three universities. The survey consists of eight items designed to obtain an overall picture of the remedial reading practicum experience and to elicit information about the degree to which former students find their experiences in remedial reading education programs relevant to their current teaching situations. Specifically, two questions were addressed: (1) Are preservice remedial reading clinical/practicum experiences useful to actual classroom practice and, if so, to what degree?, and (2) What common characteristics are associated with the applicability of preparatory practices to later classroom experiences?

Results indicate a relatively high degree of applicability for many components associated with clinical/practicum courses. Informal procedures such as informal reading inventories and miscue analysis were among those that teachers found applicable to their classrooms. By contrast, instructional emphases such as shared reading, generating interest in reading, and computers were reported as frequently used by teachers in their classrooms, but infrequently used in practica. Regarding instructional methods used by clinical/practicum professors, respondents found most helpful those activities which actively involved them in the construction and application of knowledge as opposed to transmittal types of instruction such as readings and lecture. The findings suggest areas in which existing practica might be modified as well as directions for future research.

This project was funded in part by the Research and Creative Endeavors (RACE) Committee, Eastern Montana College.

BACKGROUND

The vast majority of universities and colleges offering degrees in reading provide practicum experiences for their students, usually in a clinical setting (Bates, 1984). However, it is only within the past ten years that information about university-based reading clinics has been collected. Services provided at reading clinics include diagnosis and instruction in the various components of the reading process. A survey of reading clinics in New Jersey revealed that their primary functions were to serve the community and to train graduate students (Preininger, 1985). The majority of reading clinics responding to the survey conducted by Irvin and Lynch-Brown (1988) identified that training graduate students was their primary function. Despite the credence given to the clinical experience in preservice teacher education, there have been no data collected on the degree to which the clinical practicum experience prepares students for later professional responsibilities as classroom teachers or reading specialists.

Daves, Morton, and Grace (1990) found a low correlation between the instructional practices touted in undergraduate reading courses and the instructional practices actually employed by novice teachers in their classrooms. Since there is evidence that the most salient influence on teacher behavior is practicum experiences, it is logical to investigate the relationship between practica provided education students and the actual demands of their professional positions.

Although no data have been collected on the educational preparation of reading teachers per se, data collected on teachers' perceptions of their undergraduate and graduate preparation in general suggest that training programs may not be providing "effective, explicit, and contextualized

instruction within the didactic setting or within practicum settings" (Lyon, Vaassen, & Toomey, 1989, p. 168). Such feedback is particularly illuminating in light of the fact that the needs of many American public school children are not being met. Lyon, Vaassen, and Toomey (1989) and others suggest that teacher preparation programs may not be doing an adequate job of preparing teachers for the complexity of the demands they face in the daily life of classroom teaching.

METHOD

The Sample

The sample consisted of alumni of graduate level programs in reading education at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo, the University of Minnesota, and Eastern Montana College. These three universities were selected based on the accessibility of student records and on the difference in geographical areas they represent. Surveys were sent to all students for whom records could be found who had completed either a Master's degree in Education with an emphasis in reading or a graduate level licensure program in reading education within the past five years.

Each of the three universities from which the sample was drawn offers a specialization in reading education based on coursework and a clinical or practicum experience in remedial reading instruction and diagnosis. At SUNY Buffalo, this specialization is based on a two course sequence comprised of a course focusing on the diagnosis and remediation of reading difficulties and a clinical practicum in which students actually diagnose and instruct students with reading difficulties at the University Reading Center. Students are provided with one on one or small group

supervision and attend a weekly seminar during the practicum. At the University of Minnesota and at Eastern Montana College, there is also a two course sequence composed of coursework related to diagnosis and instruction as well as a school-based practicum experience.

Based on information gleaned from the background information section of the survey, 4 of the respondents were male (6.8%) and 54 (93.2%) female. Most of the respondents were white, with only 1 identifying herself as African American (1.7%), 1 identifying herself as Native American (1.7%) and no respondents identifying themselves as Hispanic or Asian. The years of full-time teaching experience ranged from 1 to 31 years, with an average of 9.

The survey revealed that the three most common instructional methods used in clinic/practicum by the professor were: one to one feedback with students (f=42), observations of teaching with feedback (f=37), and oral reports or presentations by members of the class (f=27). The least frequently employed instructional methods were: films (f=6), guest speakers (f=10), and supervisor assigned to a small group (f=11).

The Survey

The survey consists of eight items and a section on background information. The items were designed to obtain an overall picture of the remedial reading practicum experience and to elicit information about the degree to which former students find their experiences in remedial reading education programs relevant to their current teaching situations.

The eight items found on the survey consist of two open-ended items and the following 6 items: (1) Required readings used by professor, (2) Instructional methods used in clinic/practicum by professor, (3)

Diagnostic/assessment measures and procedures used with students/clients, (4) Instructional procedures used with students/clients, (5) Forms of communication (e.g., diagnostic reports, lesson plans, parent conferences), and (6) Population. The open ended questions (items seven and eight) required respondents to write about the practicum experiences they felt should be continued with future students as well as the experiences they felt should be discontinued or modified. The specific entries for each of the first four items came from the principal investigators' knowledge of commonly used materials and procedures as well as reports of common practices in reading clinics (Bates, 1984; Bean & Quatroche, 1989-90; Irvin & Lynch-Brown, 1988).

The first item, required readings used by professor, simply required respondents to check the readings they had used in their practicum course from among ten readings listed. The same procedure was followed for the second item which focused on instructional methods used in the practicum, however respondents also ranked each of the instructional methods they checked on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being "not very helpful" and 5 being "extremely helpful". Items 3 through 5 were a bit more in depth. Each required respondents to first check the diagnostic/assessment measures (Item #3), instructional procedures (Item #4), and forms of communication (Item #5) that they had used in their graduate program. They then marked the ones that they were currently using in their job situation. This provided a sense of what was used *then* compared to what is used *now*. Finally, respondents ranked each assessment measure, instructional procedure, and form of communication on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being "not very helpful" and 5 being "extremely helpful". The sixth item, population, requested information related to the race, type of community

(i.e., rural, suburban, urban), grade, and level of reading difficulty reflected in the students/clients with whom respondents worked during their practicum experience.

The Procedure

Three doctoral students in reading education reviewed the survey as it was developed, providing feedback on its understandability, ease of response, and overall structure. The survey was then sent to 192 former students of the three institutions involved in the study. The purpose of the survey was explained in a cover letter that accompanied the survey. Two months later, 36 surveys had been returned. Thus, a second mailing took place. As a result of the second mailing, an additional 22 surveys were returned, resulting in an overall response rate of 30 percent.

DATA ANALYSIS

Frequencies were calculated for all entries in items 1 through 5. For items requiring respondents to check separate columns for use *then* (during graduate program) and use *now* (in teaching position), percent frequencies were calculated. The percent frequency (*pf*) is the ratio of use now to use then and is an indication of the degree to which preparatory experiences match later field experiences. A low percent frequency indicates a tool or method that is frequently used in preparation, but infrequently used in practice. A high percent frequency indicates a tool or method that is frequently used in practice but infrequently used in preparation. A percent frequency of one indicates an entry that is used equally in preparation and in practice.

The higher the percent frequency for any given tool or method, up to and including a percent frequency of 1, the greater the applicability of that tool/method. Percent frequencies greater than 1 reflect practices that were not used in preparatory coursework, or used minimally, but later adopted by teachers during actual practice in classrooms. Percent frequencies greater than 1 might be the focus of recommendations for content changes in university courses.

A total of 51 subjects responded to the two open-ended questions in the survey. These questions asked teachers to describe which experiences they had in the clinic/practicum course that were most helpful in preparing them for their current position (item #7) and which experiences were least helpful (item #8). The responses were read, parsed by idea units, and grouped. This analysis yielded a total of 210 idea units—136 experiences described as most most helpful and 74 suggestions for improving experiences that were least helpful.

RESULTS

Research Question One:

Are preservice remedial reading clinical/practicum experiences useful to actual classroom practice and, if so, to what degree?

The results of Item #2 suggests that the instructional methods most frequently employed by clinic/practicum professors are highly valued among preservice teachers. One to one feedback to student, observations of teaching with feedback, and oral reports/presentations by class members obtained average ranks of 3.95, 4.64, and 2.93, respectively on a scale of 1 to 5.

An investigation of the three diagnostic/assessment procedures most frequently used in the clinic/practicum reveals relatively high percent frequencies (*pf*), suggesting a high degree of applicability of these procedures to actual classroom practice. These procedures were the informal reading inventory (*pf*=.71), miscue analysis (*pf*=.77) and informal observation (*pf*=1.0). Forty-four respondents reported use of IRIs "then" (i.e., in the clinical/practicum situation) and 31 reported using them now (i.e., in their current teaching situations). Thirty-five respondents reported use of miscue analysis then and 27 reported using it now. Finally, 34 respondents reported use of informal observation then, and 35 reported using it now.

Those diagnostic/assessment procedures with a *pf* greater than 1 are those used more in the classroom than they were in preparation. Among the most frequently used procedures now, two have *pf*s slightly above 1. The three procedures used most frequently now are: informal observation (*pf*=1), nondirected and directed reading activity (*pf*=1.1), and writing sample (*pf*=1.4). All of the procedures cited as frequently used, either then or now, are associated with average ranks above 4—further indication of their perceived value.

The procedures/instruments reported as least frequently used now were the Gilmore Oral Reading Test, the Wepman Perceptual Battery, the Bender-Gestalt Test, and the Durrell Analysis of Reading all of which have *pf*s of 0 due to non-use now.

Turning to Item #4, the instructional procedures cited as most frequently used then are word recognition development (*pf*=.82; x rank=3.7), comprehension development (*pf*=1; x=4.0), and developing confidence (*pf*=1; x=4.4). The instructional procedures cited as most

frequently used now are writing (*pf*=1.3; x=4.3), reading to students (*pf*=1.3; x=4.2), literature (*pf*=1.3; x=4.5), and generating interest in reading (*pf*=1.1; x=4.3). Respondents reported neurological impress, visualization/imagery, and VAKT as the instructional procedures least frequently used now.

The form of communication (Item #5) with the *pf* closest to 1 without exceeding 1 is lesson plans (*pf*=.88). Parent conference, student conferences, and school conferences obtained *pf*s of 1.46, 1.09, and 2.75, respectively, indicating that they are more highly utilized in actual teaching situations than they are in practica.

Although the data suggest a higher degree of applicability among instructional procedures than among assessment procedures, responses to the open ended questions (Items #7 and #8) suggest that teachers feel their preparation was valuable to their current experiences. Almost twice as many responses were given to the question ". . .what experiences were most helpful in preparing you. . .?" as were given to the question ". . .what experiences were least helpful?" (136 versus 74). There was a great deal of variance among the responses to the last item resulting in 11 idea categories. The majority of teachers either did not respond to this question or stated that they could not think of any part of their experience that was not helpful in some way. The top three areas that were listed as not helpful actually described what teachers would like to see more of, rather than less of. These include the need to have more experiences with real students (16%), a greater emphasis on what is workable in a real school setting as opposed to a clinical setting (11%), and diagnostic/assessment techniques that are practical (10%).

Research Question Two: *What common characteristics are associated with the applicability of preparatory practices to later classroom experiences?*

It appears that what teachers perceive as most helpful during their formal remedial course were elements associated with transactional ways of learning. That is, teachers found activities which actively involved them in constructing and applying knowledge as those most helpful. Traditional, transmittal types of learning such as readings, lectures, and videotapes were not reported as very helpful. Instead, what was helpful were activities that involved real students such as tutorial, learning and applying a variety of teaching strategies, writing case studies/learning logs, and sharing and reflecting on instruction .

DISCUSSION

The most frequently listed instructional procedures used in clinical courses focus on the development of (1) word recognition, (2) comprehension, and (3) student confidence in reading. These foci reappear in classrooms as illustrated by the high ranks for "use now" (3.7, 4.0, and 4.4, respectively) and their *pf*s which range from .82 to 1.00. Procedures such as writing (*pf*=1.3), shared readings (*pf*=1.3), use of literature (*pf*=1.3), generating interest in reading (*pf*=1.3), computers (*pf*=2.3), and imagery (*pf*=1.3) are used more in by teachers in their jobs than they were in course work or practicum experiences, suggesting future directions for university preparatory programs. It appears that teachers may be moving toward a more holistic approach to literacy instruction than is reflected in preparatory programs.

As indicated previously, it appears that what teacher perceive as most helpful during their formal course work were elements associated with transactional ways of learning. That is, teachers found activities which actively involved them in constructing and applying knowledge as those most helpful. Traditional transmittal types of learning were not perceived as helpful.

It appears that informal diagnostic and assessment measures have a greater applicability to real classroom settings than do other measures. Informal procedures provide teachers with ways to explore the needs of children individually or in small groups by within authentic contexts. A commonality between an IRI and Oral Reading Analysis is that they both use real text and not contrived passages. Teachers are able to adapt these measure for narrative versus expository texts thereby enabling them to collect information about how students are reading school materials. Examining student strengths and weaknesses in relation to authentic school tasks is crucial for teachers in providing instruction that is meaningful and relevant. The importance of authentic assessment tasks which take into account classroom contextual factors is further supported by the assessment tools that were listed as most frequently used now: Observation, Nondirected and directed reading activity, and Writing samples.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Respondents

Gender		Race					
Male	Female	White	African American	Hispanic	Native American	Asian	Other
4 (7%)	54 (93%)	56 (96%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 2

Most and Least Frequently Used Procedures Now with Percent Frequencies and Average Ranks

	Percent Frequency	Average Rank
Diagnosis/Assessment		
Most Frequently Used Procedures		
Informal Observation	1.0	4.3
Nondirected/Directed Reading Activity	1.1	4.4
Writing Samples	1.4	4.3
Least Frequently Used Procedures		
Gilmore Oral Reading Test	0.0	3.0
Wepman Perceptual Battery	0.0	3.0
Bender-Gestalt Test	0.0	3.0
Durrell Reading Analysis	0.0	3.0
Instruction		
Most Frequently Used Procedures		
Writing	1.3	4.3
Reading to Students	1.3	4.2
Literature	1.3	4.5
Generating Interest in Reading	1.1	4.3
Least Frequently Used Procedures		
Neurological Impress	0.9	4.2
Visualization	1.3	3.9
VAKT	.86	3.8

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of "Most Helpful" Emergent Categories

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage+
Working with students: Actual teaching/tutorial experiences	32	24
Immediate feedback by instructor/supervisor via observation	23	17
Exposure to variety of teaching strategies, methods, materials	27	20
Learning & practice of assessment measurers	15	11
Writing case studies for students or learning logs	14	10
Sharing & reflecting on instruction: discussion & modeling	12	9
Coursework: readings, seminars, theory	8	6
Practice in parent conferencing	5	3

+Note: Percentages were calculated by dividing the number of responses found in each category by the total number of responses for the item.

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages of "Least Helpful" Emergent Categories

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage+
Don't know, no response, or no suggestions	20	27
Want more experiences with real students	12	16
Want more emphasis on what is workable in school settings versus clinic	8	11
Need more practical assessment measures	7	10
Limited readings and/or meaningless papers/reports	7	10
Lecture/passive situations	5	7
Need more emphasis on how to remediate specific individuals rather than generalizing	4	5
Previous coursework	3	4
Reports/learning logs	4	5
Emphasis of one area in content (too much or too little)	2	2
Outdated materials	2	2

+Note: Percentages were calculated by dividing the number of responses found in each category by the total number of responses for the item.